

AESOP's Thematic Groups – Part 1: French and British Planning Studies Group

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Introduction

The French and British Planning Studies Group was founded in 1998, by British academics, who had undertaken research in France. The co-founders of the group were Philip Booth (University of Sheffield) and Charles Fraser (South Bank University). The main aim of the group has been to provide a forum of discussion and more specifically address three objectives, to:

1. create a dialogue at the interface between the Anglophone and Francophone worlds in the domain of urban planning and urban studies
2. provide comparative reflections on how national research can feed into the broader Anglophone and Francophone academic world
3. comparatively explore approaches to urban problems in the Anglophone and Francophone worlds in a manner that is intellectually rigorous and promotes the development of comparative methodology, assessments and outcomes relevant for academics and practitioners.

The planning and urban policy systems in France and in England, and the fundamental similarities and differences between these two countries that are such near neighbours and yet have developed very different modes of planning in terms of structure, practical application and underlying philosophies, have provided a rich field of enquiry since the Group's foundation. The Group currently gathers more than 50 members, both researchers and planning professionals, mostly from Britain and France but also from some third countries. The current convenors are Dr. Lauren Andres (University of Birmingham) and Dr. Olivier Sykes (University of Liverpool). Together with a dedicated steering group, composed of Elsa Vivant (Université Paris-Est), Florine Ballif (Université Paris-Est), Philip Booth (University of Sheffield), Mike Devereux (University of the West of England), they are responsible for overseeing the activities of the Group. Since 2005 it has been formally constituted as a sub-group of the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP)¹. This has enabled it to tap into a larger European audience and have a presence at the annual AESOP congresses.

Group Working Method and Philosophy

Very soon after its foundation the group developed into a dialogue between French and British academics undertaking research in the other country, which allowed in-depth discussion based on the extensive knowledge and experience of its members. In the first instance the Group had no other objective than to provide a meeting point for the exchange of ideas at its biannual meetings. It operated in a way that was informal, open and dictated by the interests and wishes of group members. A pattern of two meetings per year, alternating between France and the UK was been established. In France, the meetings have often been in Lille, but also in Paris, Bordeaux and Grenoble. In the UK, meetings have been held in London, Bristol,

¹ http://www.aesop-planning.eu/blogs/en_GB/french-and-british-planning-studies.

Liverpool and Sheffield. A feature of a number of these meetings has been the participation of planning practitioners from the hosting city, region or country. Often the programme has complemented academic discussions in the lecture theatre and seminar room with site visits to view particular planning, regeneration and environmental projects 'on the ground', or '*sur le terrain*' (Plate 1).

Membership of the group is defined only by an interest in, and a willingness to discuss, the differences between spatial planning and urban policy in France and Britain. Themes to be studied in the French and British contexts are selected for each year and papers are invited from members of the group and from outside experts in the chosen theme. Presentations and participant interventions may be made in either French or English as individuals prefer, reflecting a commitment to intercultural dialogue and exchange and recent debates on the internationalisation of planning research (Kunzmann, 2004; Yiftachel, 2006; Stiffel and Mukhopadhyay, 2007). The group's activities can also be seen against the backdrop of recent work that emphasises the importance of different 'planning cultures' in conditioning the nature of planning practices and the nature of the issues or problems that planning is called upon to address in different societies (Knieling and Othengrafen, 2009; Sanyal, 2005; Healey and Upton, 2010).

Group Events and Scholarship

Over the period of the group's existence a range of topics have been discussed in the programme of seminars (see Box 1).

Box 1 - French and British Planning Group - Timeline of Activities

Date	<i>Programme or Theme of Meeting</i>	Venue
May 1998 <i>mai 1998</i>	French Planning Study Group: inaugural meeting <i>Inauguration du Groupe d'études en urbanisme français</i>	University of Sheffield, Department of Town and Regional Planning, Yorkshire
October 1998 <i>octobre 1998</i>	Second meeting of the French Planning Studies Group First Participation of French colleagues <i>Deuxième réunion du Groupe d'études sur l'urbanisme français</i> <i>Première Participation des collègues français</i>	South Bank University Technopark, London, South East England
March 1999 <i>mars 1999</i>	'Future's Planning: Planning Futures', Planning Research Conference Group workshop on themes in French planning <i>Atelier du groupe sur des thèmes en urbanisme français.</i>	University of Sheffield, Yorkshire

May 1999 <i>mai 1999</i>	Lille study visit <i>Visites d'études à Lille</i>	Lille, Nord Pas de Calais
December 1999 <i>décembre 1999</i>	Group meeting <i>Réunion du groupe</i>	University of Westminster, London, South East England
September 2002 <i>septembre 2002</i>	Acting together in urban regeneration <i>La concertation et renouvellement urbain</i> Sponsored by the French Embassy and the Institut Français Avec l'appui de l'Ambassade de France au Royaume-Uni et l'Institut Français	University of Sheffield, Department of Town and Regional Planning, Yorkshire
May 2003 <i>mai 2003</i>	Comparative essays in French and British planning (1) <i>Etudes comparatives sur l'urbanisme français et britannique – (1)</i>	Centre de Recherches Administratives, Politiques et Sociales Université Lille-2, Lille, Nord Pas de Calais
September 2003 <i>septembre 2003</i>	Comparative essays in French and British planning (2) <i>Etudes comparatives sur l'urbanisme français et britannique – (2)</i>	Faculty of the Built Environment, University of the West of England, Bristol, South West England
May 2004 <i>14 mai 2004</i>	<i>Les politiques locales en matière d'urbanisme et leur mise en œuvre</i> Local planning policy and its implementation Sponsored by/Sous les auspices du GRALE	Université Paris-1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris, Ile de France
July 2004 <i>juillet 2004</i>	AESOP Congress 2004, Grenoble <i>Table Ronde / Round Table</i> <i>Shaping planning systems: challenges, opportunities and constraints in French and British planning</i>	Université de Grenoble, Grenoble, Rhone Alpes
September – October 2004 <i>septembre – octobre 2004</i>	<i>Lille-Metropole</i> Agence du développement et de l'urbanisme de Lille	Lille, Nord Pas de Calais
January 2005 <i>janvier 2005</i>	Public transport in a comparative context <i>Les transports en commun : une perspective comparative</i>	University of Nottingham, Nottinghamshire
June 2005 <i>juin 2005</i>	Colloque IFRESI <i>Logiques métropolitaines : modèles, acteurs et processus</i>	IFRESI Lille, Nord Pas de Calais

juin 2006 <i>June 2006</i>	Thème d'étude en 2006 - <i>Planification spatiale et les réformes du droit de l'urbanisme en France et au Royaume-Uni</i> Study theme for 2006 - <i>Spatial planning and the reforms in the UK and France</i> Premier Séminaire - La planification spatiale en France : enjeux et perspectives <i>First Seminar - Spatial planning in France : future outlook</i>	Université de Bordeaux IV, Bordeaux, Aquitaine
January 2006 <i>janvier 2006</i>	Second Seminar - The move towards 'spatial planning' in the UK : scales and issues <i>Deuxieme Séminaire - Vers une 'planification spatiale' au Royaume-Uni: échelles d'interventions et enjeux</i>	University of Westminster, London, South East England
2007	The meetings of the Group in 2007 were devoted the launch of - <i>The Spatial Planning Systems of Britain and France: A Comparative Analysis</i> Les réunions du groupe en 2007 ont été consacrées à la publication de son œuvre collaborative - <i>Systèmes de planification spatiale en France et au Royaume-Uni: une analyse comparative</i>	Paris
February 2008 Fevrier 2008	<i>European Cities and Capitals of Culture a Comparative Approach (1)</i>	Liverpool, North West England
June 2008 Juin 2008	<i>European Cities and Capitals of Culture a Comparative Approach (2)</i>	Lille, Nord Pas de Calais
September 2011	UK-Ireland Planning Research Conference <i>Potentials and challenges of temporary land uses:</i>	Birmingham, English Midlands
2012	<i>Knowledge Economy and Higher Education</i>	Lille
April 2012	<i>Urban Rails 2012 (1) - Rail and Urban Development</i> Supported by financial and in-kind support from the University of Paris I – Panthéon Sorbonne, CRIA, the University of Liverpool, Town Planning Review, Réseau Ferré de France.	Université de Paris 1 Panthéon Sorbonne, Paris. Ile de France
November 2012	<i>Urban Rails 2012 (2) - Rail and Urban Development</i> Supported by financial and in-kind support from the University of Liverpool, the University of Paris I – Panthéon Sorbonne, Town Planning Review, the Association of European Schools of Planning (AESOP), Réseau Ferré de France, Merseytravel,	University of Liverpool, Liverpool, North West England

	Merseyrail, Network Rail, the Franco-British Council, Sharethecity.org, and Cass Associates	
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The activities of the Group have also resulted in numerous scholarly publications arising from collaborations between group members, 'write-ups' of individual contributions to group events, and collective efforts between members of the Group. The Group has produced two books and two special editions of *Town Planning Review*.

- *Démocraties métropolitaines : transformations de l'Etat et politiques urbaines au Canada, en France et au Royaume-Uni* (Booth, and Jouve, 2004) was an outcome of the seminar on 'Acting together in urban regeneration' (La concertation et renouvellement urbain) held in Sheffield in 2002. An English language version also appeared as *Metropolitan Democracies: Transformations of the state and urban policy in Canada, France and Great Britain* (Booth, and Jouve, 2005). It took the general analysis of partnership in Britain and France presented at the seminar and extended it with case studies from both countries as well as introducing material from Canada. The book looked at partnership both at the metropolitan and local levels. The cases covered included Lille, London, Montréal, Sheffield, Toronto and Villeurbanne. The conclusion considered in particular the contrast between deliberative and participatory democracy and traditional forms of democratic accountability in the local state and the role of partnership as an adaptive mechanism in the face of globalisation.
- *Spatial Planning Systems of Britain and France* (Booth et al. 2007) was published simultaneously in English and French and each chapter was co-authored by French and British members of the Group. It offered a comparative investigation of the basic contexts for planning in both countries, including their administrative, economic, financial and legal implications, and then considered substantive themes such as urban policy and transport planning through detailed analysis and case studies.
- A special issue of *Town Planning Review* on 'European Cities and Capitals of Culture' (2011 – 82/1) (Sykes, 2011) examined the relationships between culture and urban strategies in the French and British contexts. This arose from two seminars on European Cities and Capitals of Culture (ECoC) held during 2008 in Lille (ECoC, 2004) and Liverpool (ECoC, 2008). These explored the experiences of past and forthcoming ECoCs in France and Britain and other cities that have pursued cultural initiatives as part of their wider urban development strategies. More specifically, it provided insights into comparative research looking at how conditions, approaches and outcomes of cultural policy could be researched and compared between places in different national contexts. The cases of the ECoC cities of Lille, Liverpool and Marseille were discussed, as well as the role of culture in the redevelopment of secondary cities like Roubaix. A critical assessment of the use of 'branded' museums in Lens, Liverpool and Bilbao, as flagship projects,

was also provided stressing the development of competitiveness strategies rather than distinctiveness.

- During 2012 members of the French and British Planning Studies Group based at the University of Liverpool and University of Paris 1 – Sorbonne hosted two seminars dedicated to the exploring the relationships between rail and urban development (Figure 1). The seminars brought together academics with practitioners and incorporated visits to view rail investments in Liverpool and Paris. Papers presented explored the challenges of sustainable urban development along with preoccupations about energy costs, which are leading developers and urban planners to place rail transport at the centre of their concerns. The first event took place in Paris in May 2012 and addressed light rail development in Europe with a particular focus on the situation in the UK and France (Wray, 2012). The second seminar took place in Liverpool in November 2012 and considered heavy rail as a means of serving and stimulating urban development in metropolitan areas (Brown et Al., 2013). The events resulted in a Special Issue of *Town Planning Review* on (2014 – 85/2) (Desjardins, Maulat and Sykes, 2014). This brought together a selection of papers considering the challenges of the development, or redevelopment, of heavy and light rail-based networks in French and British metropolitan districts, focussing in particular on objectives, players, and processes, and the links between these projects and territorial development.

Future Plans

Themes for the Group's work in 2014/2015 are currently being discussed and will be opened to wider debate amongst the group membership during a meeting at the AESOP Congress 2014 in Utrecht. Initial ideas to emerge based on suggestions from group members, include: examining the role, impact and constraints of retail development in French and British city centres and suburbs; pedestrianisation and accessibility planning; and, the experience of French professionals working as planners in the UK and UK professionals working in France. The Group is also keen to maintain its tradition of not only engaging and bringing together academics on both sides of the Channel, but also fostering interactions between research and practice both within and between each country. The ongoing interest amongst French and British practitioners in sharing (best) practices on planning challenges in both countries, as well in as exchanges on the subjects of qualifications and professionalism, is evidenced by a number of communications from professionals that the Group has received.

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Figure 1 – Urban Rail Seminars, 2012

